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SPEECH

OF

MR. WINTHROP, OF MASSACHUSETTS,

ON

THE OREGON QUESTION.

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, U. S., FEB. 1, 1845.

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SPEECH.

House of Representatives of the United States, Feb. 1, 1845. The bill for the organization of a Territorial Government in Oregon, being under consideration in the Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union—

Mr. WINTHROP said:

I took the floor last evening, Mr. Chairman, as I stated when the committee rose, with no view of preparing myself for any formal speech on the Oregon question. It may be remembered, that I addressed the House on that question at some length last year. The circumstances of the case have not materially changed since then, and my opinions in regard to it are altogether unaltered. I shall content myself, therefore, with a few remarks in reference to the precise bill under consideration, and with some observations in reply to gentlemen who have preceded me in the debate.

I shall enter into no argument of the American title to the Oregon territory. No such argument, certainly, is needed to convince the Members of this House of the justice of our claim to that territory. Whatever else we may differ about, we all seem to have a sufficient sense of the soundness of our own title. It seems to be forgotten, however, that it is Great Britain, and not the United States, which requires to be convinced on this point. If gentlemen would only undertake to satisfy Sir Robert Peel and Lord Aberdeen that the American title is entirely indisputable, and that the British pretension is altogether void and groundless; or if they could fortify Mr. Calhoun in his efforts to enforce these positions upon the British minister with whom he is treating, they would turn their researches and their rhetoric to a more profitable account. I fear they are contributing to no such result. I am inclined to believe that arguments, however strong, would lose much of their weight in the quarters I have suggested, when uttered in the tone of menace and defiance which has characterized so much of this debate. Nor can I forbear to say, that it appears to me extremely impolitic for us to be publicly engaged in any arguments on the subject, while negotiations in regard to it are actually on foot within ear-shot of this Hall, and while we are necessarily ignorant how far our own individual views may conform to those, which the American Secretary of State may be at this moment pressing upon the attention of the British negotiator.

Indeed, sir, this whole proceeding is, in my judgment, eminently calculated to impede and embarrass the negotiations in which the two governments are employed. We have received authentic assurances that those negotiations have not yet failed, that they are still in progress, and that a communication in regard to them may be expected from the Executive before the close of the present session. Why not wait for this communication? Why insist on taking any step in the dark, when, in a few weeks at the most, we shall be able to act advisedly, and to see clearly the ground on which we are treading?

I cannot help thinking, Mr. Chairman, that the course proposed to be pursued on this subject, savors somewhat of distrust of the hands to which our side of this negotiation is committed. I know not that any such thing is intended. I know not that there is any purpose to influence, by this pro-

ceeding, the Cabinet arrangements of the President elect. It seems to me, however, that the peculiar friends of the present Secretary of State may well feel some little jealousy on the point. There is such a thing known to the Parliament of Great Britain as a *vote of confidence* in the ministry. The passage of this bill, taken in connexion with the circumstances under which it will have been passed, and with the considerations by which it has been urged, will seem not a little like a *vote of want of confidence* in our American Secretary. I am no champion of Mr. Calhoun's. His Texan negotiations and correspondence have certainly not inspired me with the most enthusiastic admiration of his diplomatic ability or tact. But it seems passing strange, I confess, that any of his friends should be willing to acquiesce in such marked imputations on his statesmanship and ministerial fidelity as have been heard on all sides of the House. "We cannot wait for negotiations. We want no more of them. They are sacrificing our territory. They are only another name for surrenders of our rightful soil and sovereignty." These are the cries by which this measure is to be carried through! Why, sir, I should imagine, from all this, that we had some unprincipled or incompetent British Whig at the head of our Foreign affairs, ready to mart our territory for gold; or that some such person was likely to succeed to the Department of State at the earliest moment. Such cries are the stale and unfounded reproaches with which political opponents have been wont to assail our public functionaries for party effect. That they should now be heard from the self-styled Democracy of the House, while a Democratic Secretary of State has the great seals of the nation still in his hand, and while a fire-new Democratic administration is on the very eve of accession, is, indeed, not a little extraordinary.

No more negotiations! Why, sir, one would suppose that this would be the very time when a majority of this House would desire to have negotiations entered upon, and would feel a confidence that they would be conducted to a triumphant conclusion. What have they to fear? In the humiliating failure of all previous negotiations, they have the foil which is to give a greater brilliancy to their own success. If the treaty of Washington was really so inglorious a surrender, pray, pray, Mr. Chairman, do not forbid the abler, the more accomplished, the more patriotic negotiator of your own choice, present or future, to give us the example of a better treaty. Do not forbid him to retrieve the character of American diplomacy; to pluck up the drowning honor of the country from the waters of the St. John's; and to show us, for all time to come, how to preserve, with a greater skill, at once the rights and the interests of the Republic, including that highest of all her interests, *Peace!*

No more negotiations! The treaty of Washington an inglorious surrender! To be sure, four-fifths of the Senate ratified that treaty, and the whole country applauded it. But then *Maine* has never assented to it! So says one of the honorable members from Maine, (Mr. HAMLIN.) Maine had her commissioners here, had she not, with full powers to agree upon a conventional line of boundary? and they did agree upon such a line. And Maine has since received into her treasury the money for which those commissioners stipulated, and for which the treaty provided. Not, sir, the mere reimbursement of expenses incurred in maintaining her supposed rights, as the honorable member implied, but the rated consideration for the lands to which she relinquished her claim. And yet the honorable member insists that Maine has never yet assented to the treaty! This is an extraordinary posi-

tion, certainly. I trust that it is not advanced now, as a pretence for repudiating the treaty, and for setting up a new claim to *re-annexation*, hereafter. How is the position sustained? Simply by the allegation that the treaty was opposed by "the only Democratic Senator from Maine in the body by which the treaty was ratified." As if it were not an ample set-off to that suggestion, that the treaty was supported by the only *Whig* Senator from Maine at the same period; a gentleman (the Hon. GEORGE EVANS) of whom I may say, without intending any disparagement to the Democratic Senator referred to, (the Hon. REUEL WILLIAMS, for whom I have a high personal esteem, founded upon a long acquaintance,) that he is second to none of his colleagues, past or present, nor, indeed, to any member of the body to which he belongs, in ability, in patriotism, or in a just regard for the rights and the interests, either of his own State or of the nation at large.

No more negotiations! Why, Mr. Chairman, where is such a doctrine as this to lead us? Inevitably to war. To war with England now; to war with all the world hereafter, or, certainly, with all parts of the world with which we may have controversies of any sort. And even war can never put an end to the necessity of negotiation. Unless war is to be perpetual, you must come back to negotiation in the end. The only question in the case before us—the only question in every case of disputed international rights—is, not whether you will negotiate or fight, but whether you will negotiate only, or negotiate and fight both. Battles will never settle boundaries between Great Britain and the United States, in Oregon, or elsewhere. The capture of ships, the destruction of commerce, the burning and plundering of cities, will leave us just where we commenced. First or last, negotiation alone can settle this question. For one, therefore, I am for negotiation first, before war, and without war. I believe that we shall get quite as much of Oregon in this way; and I know that we shall get it at less expense, not merely of money, but of all that makes up the true welfare and honor of our country.

Sir, the reckless flippancy with which war is spoken of in this House and elsewhere, as a thing to be 'let come,' rather than wait for the issue of negotiations, is deserving, in my judgment, of the severest rebuke and reprobation from every christian patriot and statesman. I say *let it not come, let it never come*, if any degree of honorable patience and forbearance will avert it. I protest against any course of proceeding which shall invite or facilitate its approach. I protest against it, in behalf of the Commerce of the nation, so considerable a part of which I have the honor to represent. I protest against it, in the name of the public morality and Religion, which ought to be represented by every member on this floor. I protest against it, also, in the spirit of a true Republican Democracy. My venerable colleague, (Mr. ADAMS,) alluded yesterday to the old and well-known correspondence of James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, under the signatures of Helvidius and Pacificus, and expressed his wish that it might be freshly read by all who took an interest in ascertaining the just limitations of Executive power. I cordially respond to that sentiment. But I will venture to say that no one will read these letters without being struck with the force, the beauty, the consummate justness and truth of a warning against war, which one of those letters contains, and which constitutes the crown jewel of the whole series.

"War is, in fact, (says James Madison,) the true nurse of Executive aggrandizement. In war a physical force is to be created, and it is the Executive will which is to direct it. In war the public treasures are to be unlocked, and it is the Executive hand which is to dispense them.

In war the honors and emoluments of office are to be multiplied, and it is the Executive patronage under which they are to be enjoyed. It is in war, finally, that laurels are to be gathered, and it is the Executive brow they are to encircle. The strongest passions and most dangerous weaknesses of the human breast—ambition, avarice, vanity, the honorable or venial love of fame—are all in conspiracy against the desire and the duty of peace.

Hence it has grown into an axiom, that the Executive is the department of power most distinguished by its propensity to war; hence it is the practice of all States, *in proportion as they are free*, to disarm this propensity of its influence."

Such is the noble testimony which was borne by one of the fathers of our country, half a century ago, to the anti-Republican tendencies of War. And it is of this "true nurse of Executive aggrandizement," that gentlemen, who are pluming themselves upon their exclusive Democracy, are so continually crying—let it come! Such a cry, Mr. Chairman, is not only inconsistent with sound Republicanism and true morality, but it is to the last degree puerile. I intend no disrespect to any gentleman who hears me; but as I have listened to the heroic strains which have resounded through this hall for some days past, in reference to the facility with which we could muster our fleets in the Pacific, and march our armies over the Rocky Mountains, and whip Great Britain into a willingness to abandon her pretensions to Oregon, I have wished that some Philip Faulconbridge were here to reply, as he does in Shakspeare's *King John*, to some swaggering citizen of Angiers—

—"Here's a large mouth indeed,
That spits forth death and mountains, rocks and seas;
Talks as familiarly of roaring lions,
As maids of thirteen do of puppy-dogs.
He speaks plain cannon, fire, and smoke, and bounce!"

This is certainly no bad description of much of the *debate* to which this bill has given occasion, and which might better have befitted the dramatic stage than the council halls of a civilized nation.

And against whom are all these gasconading bravadoes indulged? What nation has been thus bethumped and bastinadoed with brave words! I have no compliments to bestow on Great Britain, and am not here as her apologist or defender. But this, at least, I can say, without fear of imputation or impugment, that, of all the nations of the world, she is that nation which is able to do us the most good in peace, and the most harm in war. She is that nation with whom the best interests of our country imperatively demand of us to go along harmoniously, so long as we can do so without a sacrifice of unquestioned right and honor. She is that nation, a belligerent conflict with whom, would put back the cause of human civilization and improvement more than it has advanced in a half century past, or would recover in a half century to come. Peace between Great Britain and the United States is not a mere interest of the two countries. It is an interest of the world, of civilization, of humanity; and a fearful reckoning will be theirs who shall wantonly disturb it.

In this view, Mr. Chairman, I cannot help deploring the principle of *hatred towards England*, which seems to have been recently inscribed, by not a few of our public men, as the first article of their political creed. There are those with whom a fling at Great Britain appears to be the principal study of all their oratory, and who seem to regard no argument complete,

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which does not contain some denunciation of her grasping policy or her spurious philanthropy. They seem to have adopted, in reference to England, the maxim which Lord Nelson is related to have inculcated towards France, in his advice to some of the midshipmen under his command—"There are three things (said he) which you are constantly to bear in mind: first, you must always implicitly obey orders, without attempting to form any opinion of your own respecting their propriety; secondly, you must consider every man your enemy who speaks ill of your King; and thirdly, *you must hate a Frenchman as you hate the devil.*" Such a maxim might be pardoned, perhaps, to soldiers and sailors, on the eve of an engagement in mortal combat with their foes; but it is the last which ought to be entertained by those who are entrusted with the power and the duty of pacific legislation.

But then Great Britain is so insolent and so aggressive, that we can't help hating her! She is hemming us round on every side, the honorable member from Illinois tells us, and we must make a stand against her soon, or we shall be absolutely overrun! Mr. Chairman, this phrase, that Great Britain *is hemming us in on every side*, has become so great a favorite of late years in our political dialectics, that I am disposed to inquire, before it is irrevocably incorporated into our dictionary of truisms, how far it is as exact as it is elegant.

"Great Britain is hemming us in on every side, and already has us enclosed in her net-work on our own continent;" this, I think, was the declaration of the honorable member from Illinois. How far, sir, will such a declaration bear the light of historical truth? It would seem to imply, that the United States of America was the original civilized nation established on this continent; that Great Britain had subsequently made settlements in our neighborhood; and that she had systematically proceeded to environ us on all sides with her colonial possessions and military posts. This is certainly a new reading of American history. I have some how or other obtained an impression from the schools, that Great Britain once possessed almost the whole of this continent, or, at any rate, a very much larger part of it than she now enjoys. I have an indistinct idea, that there was a day when she held dominion over almost all the territories in which we now rejoice. I have some dreamy recollection of having read or heard about stamp acts, and tea taxes, and Boston port-bills; about Bunker hills, and Saratogas, and Yorktowns; about revolutions, and declarations, and treaties of independence. And it is still my belief, Mr. Chairman, which fire will not burn out of me, that, by some means or other, Great Britain has been deprived, within the last seventy years, of by far her most valuable colonies on this continent; that there has been a great deal more of *ripping*, than *hemming*, as to this net work of hers; that, instead of her hemming us in, we have thrust her out, and have left her a comparatively, if not a really, insignificant power in this Western Hemisphere!

Sir, Great Britain has not acquired one foot of soil upon this continent, except in the way of honorable treaty with our own Government, since the day on which we finally ousted her from her old dominion within the limits of our Republican Union. Every body knows that she acquired Canada by the treaty of 1763. We ourselves helped her to that acquisition. Not a few of the forces—not a few of the leaders, by which our own independence was achieved, were trained up, as by a Providential preparation, for the noble duty which awaited them, in the war which resulted in the cession of Canada to Great Britain. Certainly, then, we have no cause of quarrel

with Great Britain that Canada is hers. But then, she has dared to think about Texas, she has cast some very suspicious glances at Cuba, and there is great reason to apprehend that her heart is at this moment upon California! True, she has formally denied, to our own Government, that she has any desire to see Texas other than an independent nation. True, she once conquered Cuba, and gave it back again to Spain by the treaty of 1763. True, she has given no outward and visible sign of any passionate yearning for the further dismemberment of Mexico. But who trusts to diplomatic assurances? Who confides in innocent appearances? Diplomatic assurances! Has not the chairman of our own Committee of Foreign Affairs warned us, that, "like the oaths which formerly accompanied treaties, they have been the cheap contrivances of premeditated hostile action?" Has he not warned us especially, against the diplomatic assurance of Great Britain in regard to Texas, as "the ordinary harbinger of whatever it most solemnly denies?"

Such a course of argument as this, Mr. Chairman, is certainly in one respect entirely conclusive. There is, obviously, no mode of replying to it. Once assume the position, that neither the words nor the deeds of Great Britain are to be taken in evidence of her designs, but that her assurances are all hollow, and her acts all hypocritical, and there is no measure of aggression and outrage which you may not justly apprehend from her. I do not believe, however, that any considerable part of this House, or of this country, will acquiesce in the propriety of proceeding upon premises which involve imputations so gross and so gratuitous. And once again I ask, where is the proof of these alarming and aggressive purposes of Great Britain, so far as our own continent is concerned? Where is the evidence that she is enclosing us in a fatal net-work, and hemming us in on every side? Nay, sir, I boldly put the question to the consciences of all who hear me—of which of the two countries, Great Britain or the United States, will impartial history record, that it manifested a spirit of impatient and insatiate self-aggrandizement on this North American continent? How does the record stand, as already made up? If Great Britain has been thinking of Texas, we have acquired Louisiana; if Great Britain has been looking after Cuba, we have established ourselves in Florida; if Great Britain has set her heart on California, we have put our hand upon Texas. Reproach Great Britain, if you please, with the policy she has pursued in extending her dominions elsewhere. Reprobate, if you please, her course of aggression upon the East Indian tribes; and do not forget to include your own Indian policy in the same commination. But let us hear no more of her encroaching spirit in this quarter. It is upon ourselves, and not upon her, that such a spirit may be fairly charged. I say to the gentleman from Illinois, as one of the peculiar friends of *re-annexing* Texas, and *re-occupying* the whole of Oregon, *mutato nomine, de te fabula narratur*.

Indeed, Mr. Chairman, the story has been told of us already. We have been anticipated in all these imputations of an unscrupulous spirit of aggrandizement. I have here a speech of Mr. Huskisson's—a name held in peculiar reverence by the friends of free-trade in this House, and entitled to the respectful regard of us all, both for the intellectual ability and the moral excellence with which it was long associated—delivered in the British House of Commons in 1830, on the political and commercial relations of Great Britain and Mexico. The speech is full of interesting and curious matter, and I doubt not that I shall be indulged in reading some passages from it to the House.

"But, sir, if there are great political interests which should induce us to endeavor to maintain to Spain her present sovereignty and possession of Cuba and Porto Rico, there are other political considerations which make it not less important—if possible, still more important—that Mexico should settle into a state of internal peace and tranquility, and of entire and secure independence. If the United States have declared that they cannot allow the Island of Cuba to belong to any maritime power in Europe, Spain excepted, neither can England, as the first of those maritime powers—I say it fearlessly, because I feel it strongly—suffer the United States to bring under their dominion a greater portion of the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, than that which they now possess."

This, Mr. Chairman, be it remembered, was a public declaration on the floor of the House of Commons, in the year 1830, by one of the most leading and influential British statesmen of that day. And I cannot help remarking, before I read on, that it appears to have produced not the slightest sensation on this side of the water. General Jackson was then President of the United States. Mr. Van Buren was then Secretary of State, and was drafting, in that capacity, those memorable instructions, which afterwards cost him his recall from London; instructions, by which the attention of the British Government was invited to the peculiar relations of amity existing, not between Great Britain and the United States, but between Great Britain and the *Democratic* Administration which had just succeeded to power. This peculiar friendship of Gen. Jackson and his friends towards Great Britain, was in no degree disturbed, it seems, by the distinct declaration, that we should not be suffered to annex Texas. There was no outcry against British interference, or British aggression. There was no clamor about her designs to effect the abolition of Southern slavery. No, sir, the abolition movements of Great Britain had not then been commenced in her own colonies. And a most notable circumstance it is, that the disposition of Great Britain to prevent the annexation of Texas to this country, should have been so clearly manifested, before she had made the slightest demonstration of an anti-slavery spirit. It puts an utterly extinguishing negative upon the charge, that her opposition is the mere result of her designs upon American slavery. But let me proceed with the speech of Mr. Huskisson.

"Within the last twenty-seven years they have become masters of all the shores of that Gulf, from the point of Florida to the River Sabine, including the mouths of the Mississippi, and of other great rivers, the port of New Orleans, and the valuable and secure harbors of Florida; and, within these few days, we hear of their intention of forming a naval station and arsenal at the islands of the Dry Tortugas, a commanding position in the Gulf stream between Florida and Cuba. With all this extent of coast and islands, we know, further, that designs are entertained, and daily acted upon—I will not say by the present Government of the United States, but, notoriously, by the people—to get possession of the fertile and extensive Mexican province of Texas. To borrow an expression of a deceased statesman of that country, 'the whole people of America have their eye' upon that province. They look to all the country between the River Sabine and the River Bravo del Norte, as a territory that must, ere long, belong to their Union. They have also, I believe, that same eye upon some of the Western coast of Mexico, possessing valuable ports in the Gulf of California. Should they obtain these districts, the independence of Mexico, I will venture to say, will be no better, or more secure, than that of the Creek Indians, or any other Indian tribe now living within the circle of the present recognised limits of the United States; and the Gulf of Mexico will become as much a part of their waters as the Black Sea was once of the waters of Turkey, or as the channel which separates England from Ireland may be considered as part of the waters of the United Kingdom.

"I may be told, sir, that these are visionary alarms, contemplating schemes of aggrandisement and ambition which never have been, and probably never will be, entertained in any quarter. At this moment, I willingly admit that *there exists a friendly disposition in the Government of the United States*, and I cannot doubt that his Majesty's Government fully reciprocates that disposition. Upon every account, I am glad to see these two powerful States living upon terms of honorable and mutual confidence, each relying upon the peaceful councils of the other. But it is not to be imputed to me that I am undervaluing this good understanding, or that I am guilty of want of respect to the United States, or even of discretion as an individual member of Parliament, if, on this occasion, I do not lose sight of those circumstances of a permanent nature which belong to the fixed policy of the United States, and to those motives of action which, however dormant at present, would probably be revived, under contingencies that, in the course of events, may hereafter arise—contingencies, which the views and passions of the American people would not fail to turn to account for the attainment of a long-cherished and favorite object.

"At all periods of our history, the House of Commons has held topics of this nature to be fair grounds of parliamentary consideration. Jealousy, for instance, of the aggrandizement of the house of Bourbon, has always been held an element entitled to enter into every general discussion affecting the balance of power in Europe, and I am sure there is nothing in the general character of Democratic Republics, or in the past conduct of the United States, from which we can infer, that their aspirations after power and aggrandizement are less steadily kept in view than those of an absolute monarch in Europe. In looking to the future, let us consult the experience of the past. But, in the case of the New World, we have something more than the history of the last thirty years to guide our judgment. The views and sentiments of those who, during that period, have directed or influenced the affairs of the United States, have been brought before us by the publication of their correspondence. I am afraid the living statesmen of this country have scarcely had time to make themselves acquainted with those views and sentiments, as they stand disclosed in the memoirs and correspondence of a deceased statesman of America, I mean the late Mr. JEFFERSON, a man who, from the period of their first declaration of independence—a declaration of which he was the author—to the close of his life, seems to have possessed the greatest ascendancy in the councils of his country, and whose avowed principles and views appear to become every day more predominant in the public feelings of his countrymen.

"In respect to the Gulf of Mexico, and the immense interests, commercial, colonial, and maritime, which are closely connected with the navigation of that Gulf, these memoirs are full of instruction—I might say of admonitions—well deserving the most serious attention of the people of this country. I will not trouble the House with any long extracts from them; but I cannot deny myself the opportunity of pointing their attention to a few passages, which show how soon the United States, after they became a separate nation, fixed their eye upon the Gulf of Mexico, and how steadily and successfully they have watched and seized every opportunity to acquire dominion and ascendancy in that part of the world. Within seven years after the time when their independence had been established, and finally recognised in 1783, we find them setting up a claim of positive right to the free navigation of the Mississippi, from its source to the Gulf of Mexico; and it is not a little curious to see what was the opportunity they took of asserting this right against Spain, a power which had materially assisted them in obtaining their independence. In the year 1790, it will be recollected that a dispute had arisen between England and Spain respecting Nootka Sound. Whilst these two countries were arming, and every thing appeared to threaten war between them, the United States thought that they saw, in the embarrassments of Spain, an opening to claim this navigation as of right. Whether such a claim could or could not be sustained by any principle of the law of nations, is a question which I will not stop to examine. The affirmative was at once boldly assumed by America, and her demand proceeded upon that assumption. The right once so affirmed, what does the House think was the corollary which the Government of the United States built upon their assertion of that sup-

posed right? I will give it in the words of Mr. Jefferson himself, not a private individual, but the Secretary of State, conveying the instructions of his Government to Mr. Carmichael, then the American envoy at Madrid:—"You know," writes Mr. Jefferson, "that the navigation cannot be practiced without a port, where the sea and river vessels may meet and exchange loads, and where those employed about them may be safe and unmolested. The right to use a thing comprehends a right to the means necessary to its use, and without which it would be useless." I know not what the expounders of the law of nations in the old world will have to say to this novel and startling doctrine. In this instruction, which is dated the 2d of August, 1790, the principle is only laid down in the abstract.

"I will now show the House the special application of it to the claim in question, by quoting another letter from Mr. Jefferson to Mr. Short, the American envoy at Paris, dated only eight days after the former, namely, the 10th of August. It is as follows: 'The idea of ceding the island of New Orleans could not be hazarded to Spain in the first step; it would be too disagreeable at first view; because this island, with its town, constitutes, at present, their principal settlement in that part of their dominions, (Louisiana,) containing about three thousand white inhabitants, of every age and sex. Reason and events, however, may, by little and little, familiarize them to it. That we have a right to some spot as an *entrepot* for our commerce may be at once affirmed. I suppose this idea (the cession of New Orleans) too much even for the Count de Montmorin at first, and that, therefore, you will find it prudent to urge, and get him to recommend to the Spanish court, only in general terms, a port near the mouth of the river, with a circumjacent territory sufficient for its support, well defined, and extra-territorial to Spain, leaving the idea to future growth.'

"Contrary to the expectation of the United States when those instructions were given, Great Britain and Spain settled their differences without an appeal to arms; and, in consequence, these practical applications of the law of nations were no longer pressed by the United States. Soon after, Spain became involved in war with France, and that war terminated in her being compelled to cede Louisiana to the latter power. In 1803, that whole province was sold by France to the United States. By this purchase they acquired not only New Orleans, but a very extensive territory within the Gulf of Mexico. I next go to the year 1806. Mr. Jefferson was then no longer Secretary of State—he had been raised to the more important post of President of the United States. In that character we find him writing to Mr. Munroe, then the American minister in London, in the following terms: 'We begin to broach the idea, that we consider the whole gulf-stream as of our own waters, in which hostilities and cruising are to be frowned on for the present, and prohibited so soon as either consent or force will permit us.' The letter, from which this is an extract, is dated the 4th of May, 1806.

"If the United States 'broached' this idea in 1806, they are not likely to have abandoned it in 1819, when, in addition to Louisiana, they procured, by treaty with Spain, the further important cession of the Floridas. That it is a growing, rather than a waning, principle of their policy, I think we may infer from a later letter which we find in this correspondence, not written, indeed, by Mr. Jefferson in any public character, but addressed by him, as a person exercising from his retirement the greatest sway in the councils of the Union, to the President. This letter, dated so lately as the 25th of October, 1823, discusses the interests of the United States in respect to Cuba and the Gulf of Mexico, and these are the statements which it avows: 'I candidly confess that I have ever looked on Cuba as the most interesting addition which could ever be made to our system of States. The control which, with Florida Point, this island would give us over the Gulf of Mexico, and the countries and isthmus bordering on it, as well as all those whose waters flow into it, would fill up the measure of our political well-being. Yet I am sensible that this can never be obtained, even with her own consent, but by war.'

These extracts from the speech of Mr. Huskisson, in 1830, Mr. Chair-

man, are at once amusing and edifying. I think no one can help smiling at the ingenious devices of Mr. Jefferson, which they disclose, for extending our dominion over sea and land. They prove, too, most abundantly, (and it was for this purpose that I have introduced them,) that all the charges against Great Britain, which we are now making, as to her designs upon Texas, upon California, and upon Cuba, are but the flattest repetition of those which Great Britain long ago arrayed against us. They prove, still further, as I have already intimated, that the jealousy of Great Britain as to the extension of our dominion over the Gulf of Mexico, was long antecedent to any movement on her part on the subject of slavery, and utterly demolish the position that her desire to maintain the independence of Texas is the mere result of spurious philanthropy and abolition fanaticism. But I leave them to speak for themselves, and turn to considerations more immediately connected with the question before us.

The honorable member from Illinois (Mr. DOUGLASS) seemed greatly excited yesterday at a remark which fell from my friend from Pennsylvania, (Mr. E. J. MORRIS,) in reference to the ultimate destiny of the Oregon Territory, and to the likelihood of its becoming the site of an independent nation, instead of remaining as a permanent member of our own confederacy. The honorable member chafed himself into a state of most towering indignation at the bare suggestion of such an idea, and denounced it in the most unsparing terms as an almost treasonable proposition for dissolving the Union. He invoked the attention of the whole country to this first intimation of a design to dismember our Republic, and demanded a prompt expression of rebuke and condemnation upon all who were privy to so monstrous and revolting a proposition. Pray, sir, does the honorable member know with whom this idea originated, or by whom, certainly, it was most deliberately and emphatically uttered in this Capitol? Let me beg his attention to a passage from the speech of an honorable Senator from Missouri, who, I hope, has lost nothing of the confidence of his own party by a course of proceeding in regard to the annexation of Texas, by which he has gained the respect of not a few of his political opponents, and has literally "overcome more than his enemies:"

"Mr. BENTON proceeded to the next inquiry—the effect which the occupation of the Columbia would have upon this Union.

"On this point he could speak for himself only, but he would speak without reserve. He believed that the union of these States would not be jeopardized by the occupation of that river, but that it would be the means of planting the germ of a new and independent power beyond the Rocky Mountains. There was a beginning and a natural progress in the order of all things. The military post on the Columbia would be the nucleus of a settlement. Farmers, traders, and artisans, would collect about it. When arrived at some degree of strength and population, the young society would sicken of a military government, and sigh for the establishment of a civil authority. A territorial government obtained, the full enjoyment of State rights would next be demanded; and, these acquired, loud clamors would soon be heard against the hardship of coming so far to the Seat of Government. All this would be in the regular order of events, and the consequence should be foreseen and provided for. This Republic should have limits. The present occasion does not require me to say where these limits should be found on the North and South; but they are fixed by the hand of nature, and posterity will neither lack sense to see, nor resolution to step up to them. Westward, we can speak without reserve; and the ridge of the Rocky Mountains may be named without offence, as presenting a convenient, na-

tural, and everlasting boundary. Along the back of this ridge, the western limit of this republic should be drawn, and the statue of the fabled god, Terminus, should be raised upon its highest peak, never to be thrown down. In planting the seed of a new power on the coast of the Pacific ocean, it should be well understood that, when strong enough to take care of itself, the new government should separate from the mother empire, as the child separates from the parent at the age of manhood. The heights of the Rocky Mountains should divide their possessions; and the mother republic would find herself indemnified for her cares and expense about the infant power, in the use of a post in the Pacific ocean; the protection of her interests in that sea; the enjoyment of the fur trade; the control of the Indians; the exclusion of a monarchy from her border; the frustration of the hostile schemes of Great Britain; and, above all, in the erection of a new republic, composed of her children, speaking her language, inheriting her principles, devoted to liberty and equality, and ready to stand by her side against the combined powers of the old world."

Such, Mr. Chairman, were the views of Mr. BENTON in 1825. Here is the earliest public expression of the idea, which has so electrified with horror the honorable member from Illinois, and has drawn forth the heaviest bolts of his indignation. Truly, sir,

"Full many a shaft at random sent,
Hits mark the archer little meant."

His fulminations, it is plain, have passed quite over the heads of his opponents, and have fallen upon one whom he would gladly have spared.

Nor is Mr. Benton the only one of the honorable member's Democratic exemplars whom he has unconsciously scathed. A most respectable and intelligent friend of mine (Mr. T. G. Cary of Boston) visited Monticello in 1818. Mr. Jefferson was then greatly interested in the subject of Western emigration, and in the reports of Lewis and Clarke. In the course of conversation he inquired whether, when Mr. Astor sold out Astoria to the British Fur Company, he retained a right to property of any kind there. "Because," said he, "I am anxious to ascertain that there was some reservation on which a territorial claim may be made. I am desirous of seeing a new confederation growing up there." "You say a *new* confederation, (I replied my friend;) you mean a *distinct* one, then." "Certainly," said Mr. Jefferson, "the extent would be altogether too great for *one* government."

The same view was expressed by Mr. Jefferson in a letter to Mr. Astor, which has been referred to by another highly intelligent and distinguished Boston merchant, (Hon. William Sturgis,) in a very able lecture upon the Oregon question, delivered before the Boston Mercantile Library Association, a few days since. In that letter, Mr. Jefferson says:

"I considered as a great public acquisition the commencement of a settlement on that point of the Western coast of America, and looked forward with gratification to the time, when its descendants should have spread themselves through the whole length of that coast, covering it with free and independent Americans, *unconnected with us but by the ties of blood and interest*, and enjoying like us the rights of self-government."

These are antiquated opinions, I shall be told, which the *young* Democracy cannot recognise. Railroads and steam engines have annihilated space, and have exploded all theories which rested on the accidents of extent and distance. But what, Mr. Chairman, becomes of that argument, of which we have heard so much in the late debate upon Texas, about *natural* boundaries, and "the configuration of the earth?" It is not a little amusing to

observe what different views are taken as to the indications of "the hand of nature," and the pointings of "the finger of God," by the same gentlemen, under different circumstances and upon different subjects. In one quarter of the compass they can descry the hand of nature in a level desert and a second-rate river, plainly defining our legitimate boundaries, and beckoning us impatiently to march up to them. But when they turn their eyes to another part of the horizon, the loftiest mountains of the universe are quite lost upon their gaze. There is no hand of nature there. The configuration of the earth has no longer any significance. The Rocky mountains are mere molehills. Our destiny is onward. We must cover this whole continent—aye, and *go beyond it, if necessary*, says the honorable member from Illinois. And all for the glory of the Republic! "The finger of God" never points in a direction contrary to the extension of the glory of the Republic! This would seem to be the sum and upshot of the whole matter. Sir, there is a definition of *glory* by the immortal dramatist whom I have already quoted, which such a course of remark has brought to my remembrance, and which I cannot forbear citing:

"Glory is like a circle in the water,
Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself,
'Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought."

And this, this, will be the glory of that spirit of aggrandizement which is seen at this moment leaping over the Sabine in one quarter, and dashing itself upon the Rocky mountains in another!

A few remarks in reference to the precise bill before us, Mr. Chairman, will bring me to a close.

I listened, sir, with great pleasure, to the remarks of the chairman of the committee by which this bill was introduced, (Mr. A. V. BROWN,) who closed the debate last evening. If the whole discussion had been conducted in the same tone and temper in which he addressed the House, and if the bill had been originally drafted in the shape to which he has expressed his willingness now to reduce it, there would have been little cause for regretting the introduction of the subject. I agree with him in his two principal positions. I concur with him, first, in the opinion that it is inexpedient for us to terminate the convention of joint-occupation until negotiations have been still longer pursued. I agree with him, also, that it is perfectly consistent with the existence of that convention for us to extend our jurisdiction over our own citizens, just so far as Great Britain has extended her jurisdiction over her own subjects, in the Oregon Territory; and, so far, I am willing to go with him.

But I am of opinion that the bill under consideration, even with the amendments which have been proposed, goes far beyond this mark. The section which provides for the granting of lands to settlers, with whatever limitations and qualifications it may be guarded, will be considered as an assumption of exclusive sovereignty, or, as an indirect mode of securing an exclusive advantage. The British Government will so construe it. And how will our Secretary of State be able to gainsay such a construction, when he has already admitted the justice with which it would be set up, in a speech of his own in the Senate of the United States within eighteen months past, as printed in the Congressional Globe before me? I need not trouble the committee with citations. Any gentleman can turn to the speech for himself.

But is it not worth while for the friends of Mr. Calhoun to pause, before they place him in a predicament, in which the only alternatives will be, either to resign his post, or to defend a course of proceeding, as Secretary, which he has openly condemned as a Senator?

Even as a measure for the American settlers in Oregon, without regard to the claims of Great Britain, this bill is not altogether to my taste. It provides for the appointment of a governor and judge, who are to have absolute authority to promulgate and enforce throughout the Territory of Oregon, any and all laws which they may see fit to select from the statutes of any State or Territory in the Union; which laws are to continue in force until positively disapproved of by Congress—a limitation which we all know, from our experience in regard to other Territories, is practically inoperative. This discretionary dominion of these two officers is to last until there shall be five thousand free white male American citizens of twenty-one years of age in Oregon to authorize the establishment of a legislative body for themselves. This will be no brief term for such a *Duarchy*. The tide of emigration is now setting towards California, and not towards Oregon. There has been a great deal of delusion as to the prospect of an early colonization of Oregon. It is now pretty well understood that there are as good lands on this side of the Rocky Mountains as on the other, so far, at least, as the country north of the 42d degree of latitude is concerned. The day is still distant, when there will be five thousand free white male American citizens in Oregon. I am told that there are not two thousand there now. And I do not believe that these American citizens will thank you, for breaking up the little temporary organization upon which they have agreed among themselves, in order to make way for so arbitrary a system as is provided for them by this bill.

One limitation upon the discretion of these two irresponsible lawgivers ought certainly to be imposed, if the bill is to pass. As it now stands, there is nothing to prevent them from legalizing the existence of domestic slavery in Oregon. It seems to be understood that this institution is to be limited by the terms of the Missouri compromise, and is nowhere to be permitted in the American Union above the latitude of $36^{\circ} 30'$. There is nothing, however, to enforce this understanding in the present case. The published documents prove that Indian slavery already exists in Oregon. I intend, therefore, to move, whenever it is in order to do so, the insertion of an express declaration that "*there shall neither be slavery, nor involuntary servitude in this Territory, except for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.*"*

But I am in hopes, Mr. Chairman, that the bill will not become a law at the present session, in any shape. Every thing conspires, in my judgment, to call for the postponement of any such measure to a future day. We ought not to contemplate the possibility of a question like this being settled otherwise than by peaceful negotiations. We ought to give ample time for those negotiations, and do nothing which can interrupt or embarrass them. We have nothing to regret in our past negotiations with Great Britain; we have nothing to fear from those in which we are now engaged. Reproaches as to the former, and menaces as to the latter, are alike but the ebullitions of party heat or personal hate, and will perish with the breath in which they

* This amendment was subsequently offered by Mr. Winthrop, and adopted by a vote of 131 to 69.

are uttered. Mr. Webster has *dared* to preserve the peace of the country by abating something of our extreme territorial claims on the Northeast, and he has earned the gratitude of all good citizens by doing so. I trust Mr. Calhoun will not be frightened out of that kindred spirit of conciliation and concession, which he has already manifested on this subject in the Senate, by the bluster and bragadochio of this debate. We have twice offered to compromise with Great Britain on the 49th parallel of latitude, and such a compromise would be the very best result that we have a right to anticipate now. And even if some slight deviations from this line should be found necessary for effecting a peaceful settlement of the question, the sober judgment of the nation would not hesitate to approve the concession.

But, Mr. Chairman, if gentlemen will insist on contemplating the necessity of a resort to arms upon this question—if they have come to the conclusion that, inasmuch as the 49th parallel has been twice offered and twice refused, there is *a point of honor* between the two nations which can only be settled by a fight—if they are converts to the syllogism of the honorable member from Illinois, that no English minister dares to accept the 49th parallel, and no American Secretary dares to offer more, *ergo*, they both *dare* to involve the world in war—still, still, I say, postpone the present proceeding. We enter, to-day, upon the last month of an expiring Administration. A new President is about to enter upon the four years term to which the people have elected him. A new Congress will soon be in existence to act upon his recommendations. Upon this new Administration has been solemnly devolved the responsibility of conducting both the domestic and foreign affairs of the nation during its next Olympiad. Let us leave that responsibility undisturbed. Let us not employ the last moments of our power in creating difficulties which others must encounter, and exciting storms which others must breast. Rather let us do what we may to secure for those upon whose shoulders the Government has fallen, a serene sky and a calm sea at the outset of their voyage, that they may take their observations, and shape their course deliberately; and let all our good wishes go with them, (as my own certainly will,) that they may complete their career, without striking either on Domestic Discord or Foreign War! If they fail in doing so, let the responsibility be wholly their own.